

Report of Work under Archaeological Supervision and Control

St Peter's Church, Yaxham, Norfolk Upgrade of electrical supply and installation of water supply

ENF 145433

Prepared for Yaxham PCC



Sarah Bates, Report no. 41

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Project name	St Peter's Church; upgrade of electrical supply and installation of water supply
Parish	Yaxham
District	Breckland
Grid reference	TG 0073 1069
NHER Ref.	ENF 145433
NCCES Ref.	CNF48402
Date of fieldwork	12th November 2018
OASIS number	333371
Accession number	2019.60

Summary

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken during upgrading the electricity supply and installing a water supply at St Peter's Church, Yaxham.

Churchyard soil and topsoil were excavated and part of a burial was exposed and was carefully removed from the excavated trench. It was subsequently reburied in the trench under the supervision of the PCC.

The only find was a penny dated 1919. Nothing of archaeological significance was found.

1.0 Introduction

St Peter's Church is situated on Church Lane in the northern part of Yaxham village centre. The village is about three kilometres south-east of Dereham in central Norfolk (TG 0073 1069).

The present work involved upgrading the electricity supply and installing a water supply to the church. The work was undertaken by Roger Tyrrell Builder (with the exterior work by groundworks sub-contractors) for Yaxham PCC.

The water pipe and electric cable ran from mains supplies outside the south gate to the churchyard and, then, in a trench northwards beneath the south path. The water pipe ran in a short 'offshoot' trench to the west wall of the porch where a stand pipe will be connected at a future date. The electricity supply cable continued northwards and entered the church at the base of the south wall of the tower. It was connected to a new distribution board positioned just within the tower at the south side of the tower arch. From there, cables ran beneath the floor of the nave to points on the south aisle wall and just south of the organ in the north-west corner of the nave (Fig. 1).

The archaeological work involved monitoring and recording during the groundworks (Fig. 1). The work accorded to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Sarah Bates to meet the requirements of a brief set by Norfolk Historic Environment Service (NCCES ref. CNF48402, Steve Hickling, 28.08.18).

Yaxham PCC funded the improvement work at the church.

The archaeological report and digital photographs will be deposited with the Norfolk Historic Environment Record. An OASIS form is included below as Appendix 1.

2.0 Geology and topography

The underlying solid geology of the area is chalk with overlying Lowestoft Formation deposits of chalky till and gravel; detrital material from glacial action and meltwater. (British Geological Survey © NERC 2015). The area is within that of the Central Norfolk Claylands and poor soils which, until the 18th century, largely supported heathland (Williamson 2005).

At the time of the work the churchyard was grassed and well-kept. The south path was gravelled and at a lower level than the grass to either side.

A benchmark recorded on the church is at 51.32m OD.

3.0 Archaeological and historical background

The church has a round west tower with bands of ferruginous conglomerate in its lower part and quadrant pilasters (masonry infill in the angle between the tower and west wall of the nave). There is some evidence for a blocked west doorway and there is a semi-circular-headed tower arch of late 11th or 12th-century date with a contemporary upper doorway which originally led from the nave roof space into the tower's ringing chamber. All these aspects have often been seen as suggesting a Saxon date and the tower is described in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) as probably Late Saxon although references in the NHER also mention the uncertainty of the church's date due to tooling on carstone quoins and the nature of the tower arch construction. Furthermore, Norfolk round tower churches are now considered by many as more likely to be of post-Conquest, late 11th or 12th century date (Heywood 2005).

The upper part of the tower is 14th-century, its windows and bell-openings of 14th-century and later medieval date, and its crenellated parapet is post-medieval. The rest of the church is of 14th and 15th-century date and replaced an earlier church. Restorations occurred in the 19th-century. The south aisle was re-roofed in 1986. An 'antique' seal is recorded as having been found in the churchyard prior to 1826.

Other sites and finds recorded in the NHER within a 500m radius of the church include the upper part of a Roman rotary quern from a field about 200m NNW of the church, a rare Middle Saxon silver penny found about 90m north-west of the church, a Late Saxon borre-style disc brooch found immediately north of the churchyard and a penny of Edward I dated 1280 which was found in a garden just south of the church.

A medieval moated site is suggested by possible earthworks, cropmarks and finds of pottery and oyster shell 300-400m north of the church.

Some sherds of medieval pottery are recorded from just west of the south-west corner of the churchyard and part of a medieval pot from about 180m SSW of the church.

A sherd of post-medieval pottery is recorded from the south-west area of the village.

A timber framed cottage dating from 1611 and a timber framed house of 16th century or possibly earlier date stand to the south and southwest of the church respectively; on the south and north sides of Norwich road. The latter was much-altered in the 16th and 17th centuries and has a front range of 19th-century date. Medieval and post-medieval pottery were found in its garden during restorations in the 1980s.

A timber framed threshing barn on a brick plinth about 120m north of the church dates to around 1700 was altered in the 19th century and more recently. It is now a house.

A 19th century rectory in Italianate style stands a little to the north-east of the church.

Fieldwalking in the 1980s in area 80-170m west of the church and extending southwards led to the recovery of prehistoric worked flints, single sherds of Middle and Late Saxon pottery, medieval pottery, and post-medieval pottery and fragments of kiln furniture. The latter materials suggest the existence of a production site for 16th-17th-century red-glazed earthenware. Just west of this area a Mesolithic flint tranchet adze, flint 'potboilers' and medieval and post-medieval pottery were found during further fieldwalking.

About 400m south of the church and extending beyond the present search area metal detecting of a large area in 2016 led to the recovery of a Roman coin and two medieval coins.

Map evidence shows that the churchyard has been extended slightly at its southern side since the 19th century although the south entrance remains as shown on the earlier maps (Norfolk County Council 2011).

4.0 Methodology

Archaeological monitoring aimed to observe and record the presence or absence, location, nature and date of any surviving archaeological deposits within the areas affected by the pipe trenches.

The trenches were dug by machine by the site contractors under archaeological control and supervision. Some awkward areas; at the church walls and in the area of an existing cable, were hand dug by the contractors.

The location of the trenches was recorded. General deposits (subsoil and topsoil) were not assigned individual numbers but were recorded on a single pro forma context sheet, for the trench.

Unfortunately the archaeologist was not informed of the work taking place inside the church and it had already been undertaken. However, the work was described to the archaeologist by Susan Martin (Yaxham PCC), see below.

Digital photographs recorded the archaeological deposits and the work outside the church generally.

Part of a skeleton exposed in the trench was recorded on a pro forma burial context sheet.

No finds of archaeological significance were made. No deposits required sampling for environmental assessment.

Site conditions (weather, light and access) were good.

5.0 Results (Figs. 1 and 2, Plates 1-6)

Context numbers are shown in square brackets and listed in Appendix 2. Depths given below were measured from the existing ground surface. The excavated trenches were 0.30m wide.

Work inside the church and the forming of an aperture for a duct through the south wall of the tower had been carried out prior to the visit by the archaeologist. Internally, the floor panments were lifted and a 50mm duct laid beneath them. Only loose sandy soil was seen (reported by Susan Martin, PCC).

The trench for the electricity cable ran from the south side of the tower southwards and roughly parallel with the west wall of the south aisle and, along this length, was 0.50m deep [1]. The trench then turned to the south-east running at approximately the same depth towards the south-west corner of the south porch (Fig. 1, Plate 1).

The trench for the water pipe ran from the west wall of the porch near its south-west corner and at a depth of about 0.70m (Plate 2). This joined the trench for the electricity cable and, from this point, the water pipe and cable were laid in the same trench, with the water pipe at a depth of 0.70m and the electric cable at 0.45-0.50m. The trench ran, approximately centrally, along the length of the south path to the gate with both services to be connected outside the churchyard entrance (Plates 3 and 4).

Some orange sand with flint gravel was exposed at a depth of 0.70-0.75m in a small hole hand-dug in the bottom of the trench just to the south of the porch. It was of natural origin. Elsewhere, the lowest exposed deposits were mixed 'churchyard soils' disturbed by grave-digging or previous drainage works. They comprised brown or slightly orange brown silty sands with occasional small to medium sized flints.

Existing (or former) drain pipes were exposed immediately south of the tower, in the trench for the water pipe beside the south porch, and immediately to the south-west of the porch. An electric cable in an iron duct was exposed running south-to-north just south of the south porch (Plate 5).

Immediately to the north of the latter mentioned drain pipe, and at a greater depth, part of a burial was exposed in the bottom of the trench. The skull and the bones of the upper/right part of the torso of an individual was recorded [2] (Fig. 2, Plates 2 and 6). It was carefully excavated from the trench. The rest of the skeleton extended outside the trench was left *in situ*.

Nothing else of significance was seen in the excavated trench.

Above the churchyard soils in the area of the turfed churchyard was brown sandy topsoil with occasional small flints. In the area of the churchyard path the lower soils were overlaid by a layer of mixed 'topsoil' and shingle about 0.25m deep (and derived from the path) with the present gravel path surface above that.

6.0 The finds

The only find was a bronze penny of George V dated 1919 (Appendix 3). It was found during metal detecting the soil from the excavated trench.

7.0 Conclusions

The surviving level of natural sand and gravel was exposed in one small area.

One burial was exposed during the work and the bones present within the area of trench were excavated and removed to enable the laying of the water pipe. The remains were reburied in the trench by a church official.

Nothing else of significance or archaeological interest was seen in the observed areas of work. Work inside the church was not seen by the archaeologist but it was reported by the PCC that only sandy make up material for the floor panments was seen in the narrow and shallow exposed areas.

Churchyard soil and topsoil was recorded and an early 20th-century penny was found during metal detecting.

Acknowledgements

The archaeological work was commissioned and funded by Yaxham PCC.

The advice of and interest of Susan Martin (Yaxham PCC) and David Lemon (Spire Property Consultants) is gratefully acknowledged.

Archaeological monitoring, recording and interpretation was by Sarah Bates who also prepared this report. Figure 1 is based upon a plan of the church provided by Spire Property Consultants.

References:

British Geological Survey 2017	http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html
Heywood, S., 2005	Round-Towered Churches in Ashwin, T. and Davison, A., (ed.) <i>An Historical Atlas of Norfolk</i> , 60-61 (Third edition)
Norfolk County Council 2011	http://www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk/mapexplorer/
Williamson, T., 2005	'Soil Landscapes' in Ashwin, T. and Davison, A. <i>An Historical Atlas of Norfolk</i> 8-9, (Third Edition)

Appendix 1

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

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OASIS ID: sarahbat1-333371

Project details

Project name	St Peter's Church, Yaxham, water supply and electrical upgrade
Short description of the project	Archaeological monitoring was undertaken during upgrading the electricity supply and installing a water supply at St Peter's Church, Yaxham. Churchyard soil and topsoil were excavated and part of a burial was exposed and was carefully removed from the excavated trench. It was subsequently reburied in the trench under the supervision of the PCC. The only find was a penny dated 1919. Nothing else of archaeological significance was found.
Project dates	Start: 12-11-2018 End: 12-11-2018
Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ENF 145433 - HER event no.
Type of project	Recording project
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	INHUMATION Uncertain
Significant Finds	COIN Modern
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Faculty jurisdiction

Project location

Country	England
Site location	NORFOLK BRECKLAND YAXHAM St Peter's Church
Study area	0 Square metres
Site coordinates	TG 0073 1069 52.656275791947 0.968173729268 52 39 22 N 000 58 05 E Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Sarah Bates
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Sarah Bates
Project director/manager	Sarah Bates
Project supervisor	Sarah Bates

Type of sponsor/funding body	PCC
Name of sponsor/funding body	Yaxham PCC

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	NHER
Digital Contents	"Stratigraphic","other"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	NHER
Paper Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Miscellaneous Material","Plan","Report"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Report of Work under Archaeological Supervision and Control, St Peter's Church Yaxham, Upgrade of electrical supply and installation of water supply, ENF145433
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Appendix 2: List of contexts

Context	Type	Category	Description
1	Trench	Contractor's trench	trench excavated for water pipe and electricity cable
2	Burial	Burial	skeleton partly exposed and removed from trench

Appendix 3: Finds

Context	Category	Material	Description	Date
1	Coin	Bronze	George V penny	1919

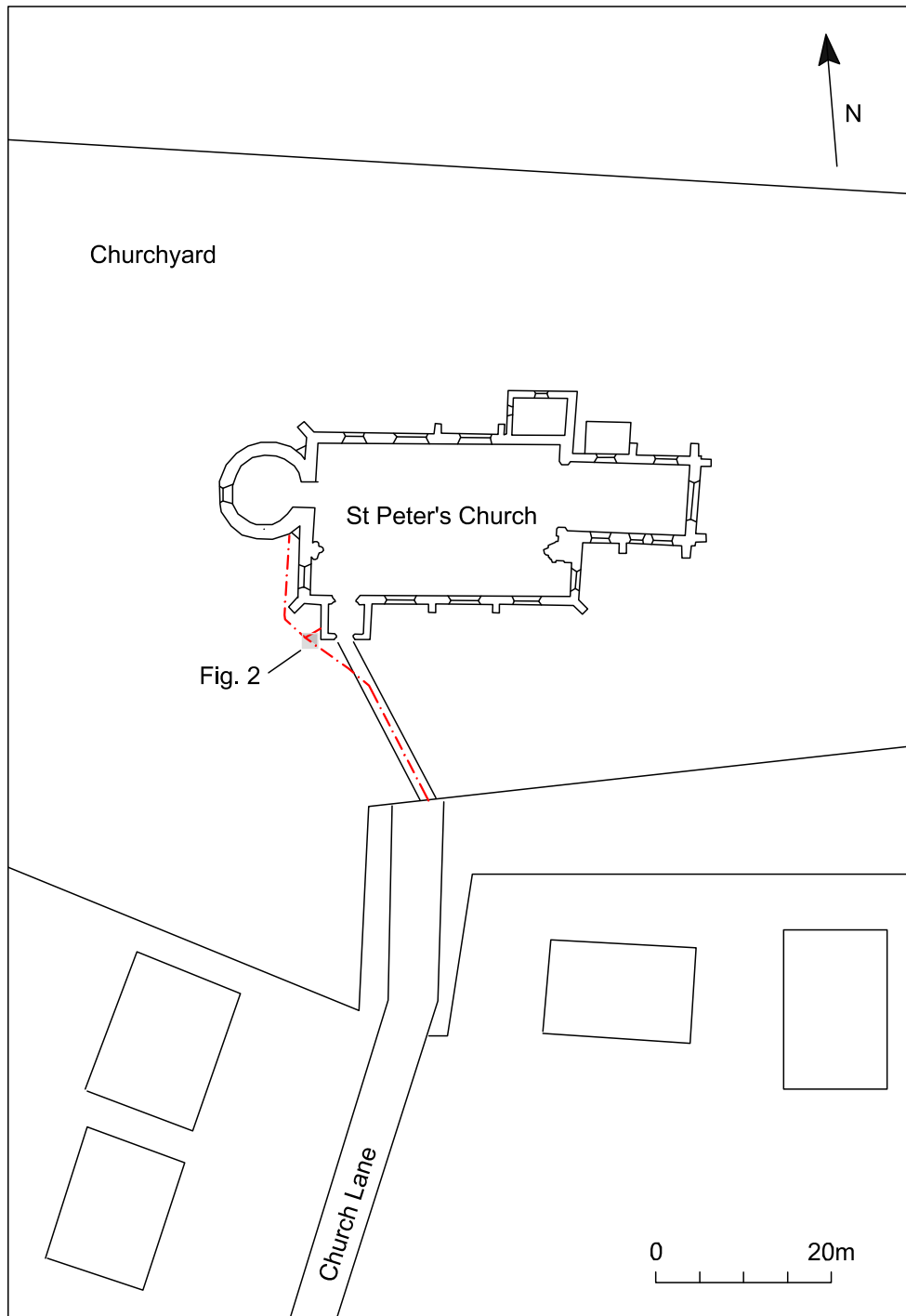


Figure 1: Location of trench, Scale 1:800

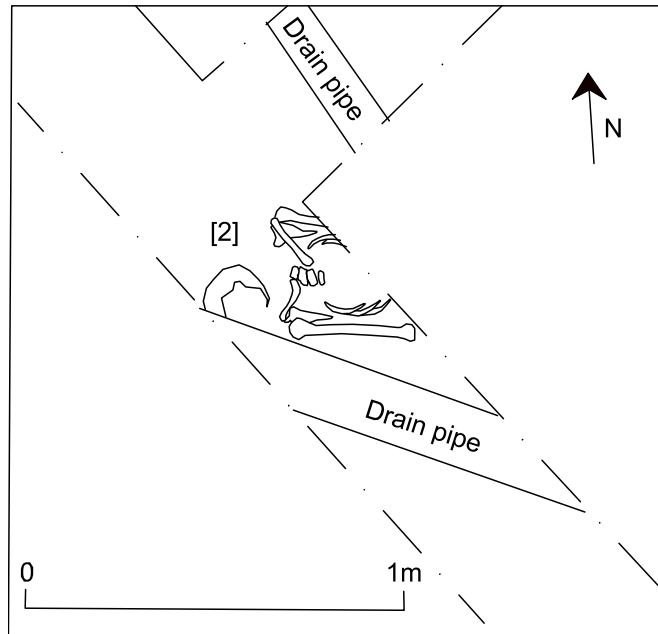


Figure 2: Burial [2], scale 1:20, for location see Fig. 1



Plate 1: Trench W of S aisle; looking N, 0.5m scale



Plate 2: Trench W of porch; burial [2] visible below drain pipe, looking N, 0.5m scale

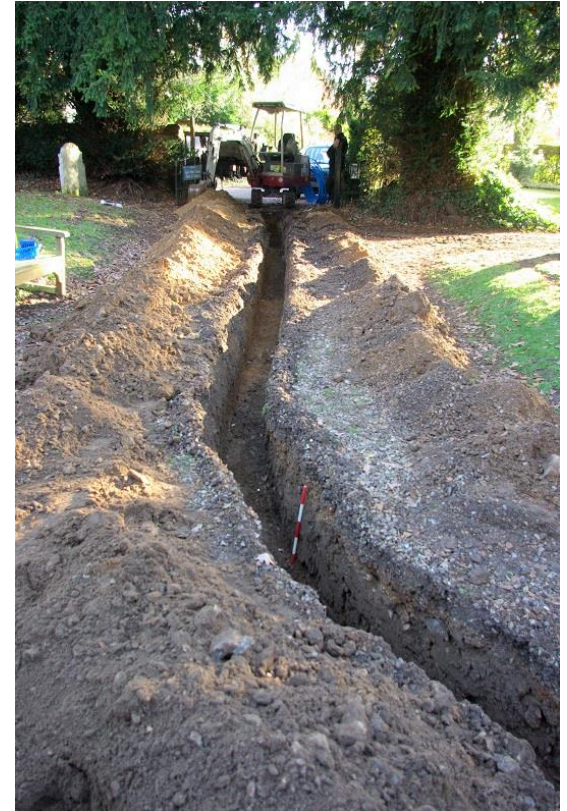


Plate 3: Trench in S path, looking S, 0.5m scale

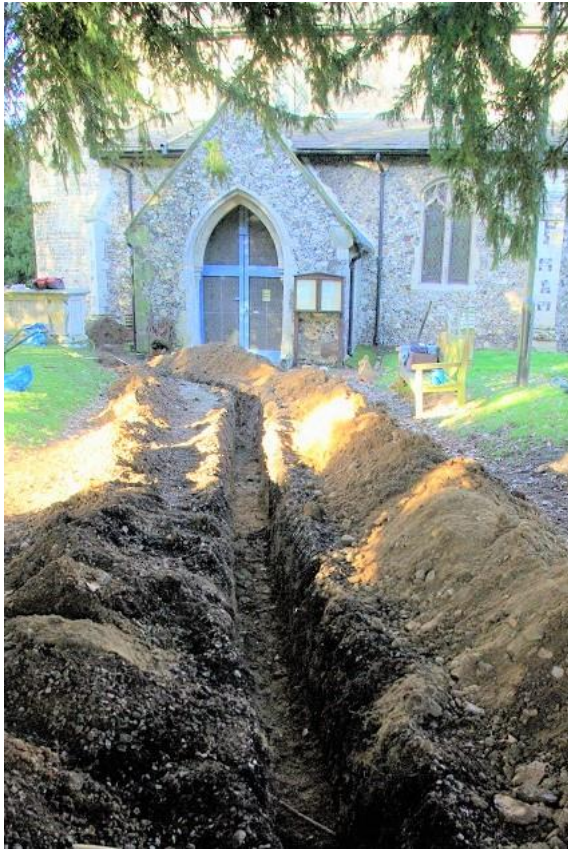


Plate 4: Trench in S path, looking N, 0.5m scale



Plate 5: Trench S of porch, existing electric cable visible, looking NW, 0.5m scale



Plate 6: Burial [2], from above, looking S, 0.2m scale